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ABSTRACT

The altering of the presentation of Japan's imperialist adventures in Japanese high school history textbooks reflects a continuing dispute between Japan and her Asian neighbors, as well as between a politically conservative bureaucracy in the Ministry of Education and a historical profession heavily influenced by "progressives" who write from a leftist perspective. While the Ministry claims it is attempting to redress a Marxist bias in the presentation of history, it has been criticized for seeking to gloss over, if not actually justify, historical Japanese imperialism. Japanese texts do contain a leftist slant, are remarkably lacking in patriotic fervor or nationalist pride, and tend to be poorly designed and physically unattractive as compared to U.S. texts. The Japanese Ministry's efforts to engender patriotism seems to have led to a Korean decision to respond in a like manner to Korean-Japanese issues with a strong wave of anti-Japanese sentiment, and to further bolster nationalism through other biased revisions, especially in regard to ancient Korean history. (PPB)

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ONE MAN'S INVASION IS ANOTHER MAN'S ADVANCE: NATIONAL HISTORY IN JAPAN AND KOREA

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The non-Asian historians among you may find the title of my paper somewhat puzzling. It refers to a continuing dispute between some Japanese historians and the Ministry of Education, as well as between Japan and her Asian neighbors, over the revision of Japanese high school history textbooks to deemphasize Japan's imperialist adventures in Asia.[1] The specific reference is to an accusation that in 1982-83 the Ministry of Education ordered authors and publishers to change references to Japanese "invasion" or "aggression" (shinryaku) in Asia to "advance" (shinshutsu). This seemingly minor semantic change was construed by some as simply one manifestation of a more sweeping revision of history, which itself reflected a widespread "revival of Japanese militarism."

The title was also meant to remind us that politics often colors the way one perceives an historical event. Thus although the Republic of Korea was in the forefront of Asian nations condemning Japan for altering history to serve political goals, Korea herself immediately responded in kind by altering its history for similar purposes.

Unfortunately, the whole affair, which continues to be a matter of concern both in Japan and abroad, was created largely by irresponsible journalistic accounts erroneously accusing the Ministry of Education of altering texts to play down Japanese militarism. The controversy originated with an erroneous report from a journalist in the Ministry's Press Club; but even after

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the Sankei Shimbun had exposed the error and tried to set matters right. many newspapers. notably the influential Asahi shimbun. and television stations continued to present the issue as though the Ministry had altered the wording of texts: the catchy phrase "from invasion to advance" (shinryaku kara shinshutsu e) became a Japanese household expression. [2]

As soon as it became a headline issue in Japan. the "textbook revision controversy" immediately became big news in neighboring Asian countries. who as victims of Japanese aggression are understandably sensitive to attempts by Japan to deny or downplay its responsibility. Especially in the light of Japan's postwar political and economic revival, other economically less developed Asian nations have ample psychological reason to protest rumors of more Japanese insensitivity to their colonial record. And in fact in this particular instance, countries like Korea and the PRC had quite specific motives in attacking Japanese textbook revision.[3] Suffice it to say, such issues provide good leverage in diplomatic relations between less developed nations and Japan: lacking either the economic or political clout to compete evenly with Japan, they can potentially profit by causing Japan international embarrassment.

Even though in this instance the Ministry of Education could be cleared of malfeasance (in fact, one scholar demonstrated that new texts used the term "invasion" even more frequently than current ones[4]), it is hardly blameless. Over the years, the Ministry has tried to convince, cajole, or coerce textbook

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companies and authors to alter their view of history.[5] The Ministry defends its actions by claiming it only seeks to redress a Marxist bias to the presentation of history in textbooks. But both at home and abroad, the Ministry has been the object of widespread criticism for seeking to gloss over, if not justify, Japanese imperialism.

Yet there is a good deal of evidence to substantiate the Ministry's claim. In fact, there is in Japan a polarization between a politically conservative bureaucracy in the Ministry of Education and a historical profession heavily influenced by "progressives" who write from a leftist perspective. The results of this polarization have affected the interpretation of history in Japan's middle and high school texts. Professor Thomas Rohlen claims that Japanese texts

> avoid topics and style offensive to the left. They are thus characterized by a bland neutrality on key social and political issues...Unlike educational materials, consciously concocted by unfettered authorities for the purpose of ideological indoctrination, textbooks in contemporary Japan evidence much less strident and less obvious sets of biases.[6]

But in fact, if one reads widely through Japanese high school texts, one can discern a definite leftist slant: anti-Americanism, a distinct bias against the dominant Liberal Democratic Party, and a careful attempt not to alienate China, the Soviet Union, or other socialist countries by condemning any of their actions in bold language.[7] Yet among American journalists commenting on the textbook revision issue, as far as I am aware, only Sam Jameson of the Los Angeles Times even noted this fact.[8]

But the writing of textbooks poses special problems. It is

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a highly political process in any country, although I think Americans often overlook that fact until some glaring example of book banning or a Supreme Court case hits the evening news. History textbooks in particular are designed to instill basic beliefs about a nation's past, to inculcate good feelings about one's country in the emerging citizenry: they are vehicles for generating nationalism and patriotism.

This is perhaps clearer to us when we look at the Soviet Union, Japan, or Korea where a Ministry of Education controls the process of textbook authorization. I normally pay little attention to American high school texts, but reading Frances Fitzgerald's America Revised several years ago sent me scurrying to a pile of recent works. Used to dealing with Asian materials, I was reminded that our textbooks start from the cover stirring our nationalistic juices, far more so than texts in either Japan or Korea. They are virtually all entitled something like The Rise of a Free People, "The Promise of America, or America! America!. By contrast, all Japanese texts are entitled Japanese History or The History of Japan and the only possible modifiers which can be added are "high school" or "new."

Not only are the titles of Japanese texts remarkably prosaic, the contents too are notably lacking in patriotic fervor. If, according to Fitzgerald, the textbook version of American history is a "sensuous experience,"[9] Japanese history remains dull and uninspiring, partially due to the standoff between the progressive historical camp and the conservative educational bureaucrats. Behind that confrontation seems to lurk

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the fear that inculcating too emotional a feeling for Japan might lead to a reemergence of the ultranationalistic school system of the prewar era.

The result is that, despite the acknowledged graphic design genius of the Japanese in other fields, their history texts are physically unattractive and largely filled with small black and white photos which complement the uninspiring prose. The few color pictures are sandwiched in the middle or put at the front, never integrated into the texts as in this country. Unlike American texts, in which we seem to feel it necessary to make learning tactile and "fun," Japanese history texts are designed to prepare students for rigorous, memorization-based college entrance exams. They are all business: just the facts, ma'am. History is neither liberation nor celebration but responsibility.

Thus for an American evaluating Japanese texts, which many Japanese and outsiders have been criticizing as "altered" by a conservative bureaucracy to glorify Japanese imperialism or support a rightwing shift in the Japanese populace, what stands out is just how un-nationalistic Japanese texts are in comparison to what we find at home. In fact, the biggest shock is that the postwar Japanese success story, the phoenix-from-the-ashes tale of Japan's rise to economic superpower with which we are familiar from Western writings, seems to have been left out! The past forty years are dealt with not in ringing patriotic adjectives, but in bland, passive voice constructions so typical of Japanese discourse: often the underlying tone is quite critical of the dominant Liberal Democratic Party's course of alignment with the United States and its single-minded focus on building an affluent

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Japan.[10] Clearly, the Ministry of Education has not been able to break the progressive professional historians' hold on the interpretation of modern history.

Textbook authorization is but one part of a larger issue with which the Japanese are still struggling, what Professor Sheehan has called "the search for a bearable past." Like Germany, Japan experienced crushing defeat by her enemies in World War II, suffered tremendous economic dislocations, lost her overseas territories, and was condemned before the world in an international tribunal.

In Japan's case, this discredited the prewar educational system whose avowed goal was the inculcation of nationalism, and left a residue of tremendous guilt among intellectuals who were not especially vociferous in their opposition to Japanese militarism. Given such a background, how does Japan generate an acceptable degree of patriotic feeling about the nation's past while accepting responsibility for its imperialist actions? The Japanese have not been very successful at solving this problem; and the struggle over national history as reflected in textbooks is only one example of the problem, albeit an emotionally charged one.

All Japanese history texts I have seen place responsibility for the war with Japan and generally describe with clear disapproval Japanese aggression in Asia. It is true, however, that explanations often differ from what Americans would expect--and certainly from what other Asian peoples demand. That is, history is more the result of impersonal forces than

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conscious human choice. Thus the underlying cause of Japan's Asian colonial adventures is more likely to be portrayed as resulting from contradictions in the capitalist system than of Japanese actions per se. There is, however, almost universal recognition and disapproval of the actions of the Japanese military to fabricate excuses to invade Chinese territory; and there is no attempt to show that the colonization of Korea or other countries was designed for humanitarian purposes.

Admittedly, there is not a great deal of space devoted to Japanese imperialism and the Pacific War and no unequivocal statement admitting to having perpetrated evil acts against neighbors. It is clear from some foreign criticisms, however, that other nations would like just that. Koreans, in particular, seem to feel that Japanese texts should focus far more attention on all the wrongs done Korea in the past.

Korea, Japan's "near but distant neighbor," suffered a greater degree of suffocation under Japanese colonial rule than other lands. Koreans also seem to keep alive, both as a natural consequence of 36 years of harsh foreign rule and as a result of government efforts, a fierce anti-Japanese sentiment which events such as textbook revision easily fan. Righteous indignation, that mystical Korean sense of <u>han</u> so beloved of cultural determinists, rises up to condemn real and imagined cases of historical revision which might diminish an admittedly underdeveloped Japanese guilt for what they did in Korea.

But Korea's response to the textbook issue has been fascinating. Outraged at what they thought were Japanese attempts to alter history to suit politics, Koreans turned to the

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very same devise. Sufferring from a somewhat similar need to work out a "bearable past," although for different reasons, the Korean government--already schooled in manipulating history for political purposes under earlier Japanese rule--found no moral dilemma in doing the same thing. If the Japanese were going to distort their history, the feeling seemed to be, so will we.

In fact, I remember a very emotional argument in which I was an unwilling participant in Seoul several years ago, when I lectured about this very issue. I had tried to argue that Japanese texts were not suddenly trying to glorify colonial rule in Korea, but proceeded as a historian to express my concern that anyone--Japanese, Korean, or American--should distort history to suit national political interests. A professor in the audience argued that Korea not only had the right to alter historical facts for nationalistic purposes, but indeed the duty to do so in order to counter malicious Japanese actions.

In reaction to the textbook revision controversy, the Korean Ministry of Education issued orders for its texts to be revised "to help students more correctly understand our national history."[11] While this raised questions about the purpose of current texts, the Ministry was clearly intent upon bolstering nationalism through it revisions. Special attention was to be focused on coverage of ancient Korean history. For example, texts were now supposed to refer to the famous Koguryo King as Kwanggaet'o the Great. What had warranted raising him from just a plain king to the "great" level was his role in "territorial expansion" (his name means "Expander of the Territory.") During

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his reign (391-412). the boundaries of his Koguryo kingdom expanded in all directions as its armies invaded and conquered surrounding peoples, incorporating them into a far-flung empire. But the Koreans of course term this an "advance" (exactly the same euphemism they condemned in the Japanese case) and celebrate it by upgrading the King's status! For the people who were "advanced" upon, Kwanggaet'o's acts were every bit as aggressive as Japanese expansion on the Asian mainland in the 20th century.

An even more blatant statement of this philosophy of national history was announced in Korean Ministry of Education guidelines just a year ago. The lengthy document makes several suggestions for minimizing or denying the influence of foreign culture, especially that of China, on Korea in ancient times. But at the same time Article 12 states that "advances made by the peoples of the Three Kingdoms and Kaya into Japan will be clearly indicated with an account that their cultural propagation exerted great influence on Japan."[12] It is difficult to keep a straight face when reading such recommendations from a Ministry of Education which has spent as much time as Korea's in objecting to exactly the same practices by Japan. Indeed, one man's invasion is another's advance.

If Japan experiences difficulty engendering patriotism and nationalism from having experienced an excess of both, Korea suffers the opposite problem. Caught between the interests of Japan, China, and Russia in the late 19th century, Korea was colonized by Japan from 1910 to 1945. Even liberation was short-lived, as internal and international discord led to division of the country and a fratricidal war which brought

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further devastation to the country. Only in the 1960s under the authoritarian regime of Park Chung Hee did Korea finally begin progress towards a modern developed nation. Yet even in the 1970s surveys of Koreans showed that attitudes towards the nation, even towards being Korean, were still very negative.

Thus one of the primary goals followed by Park, his successors Chun Doo Hwan and, thus far, Roh Tae Woo, has been to inculcate nationalism and foster patriotism. There has been a consistent policy, I have argued elsewhere, to alter the facts of history in such a manner as to engender good feelings about the history and the culture for the expedient purpose of stimulating patrictism, a process I call "uri nara-ism."[12]

The strategy has been to emphasize the "unique" qualities of Korea's indigenous culture, to deny foreign influence--even in the face of obvious evidence to the contrary, to assert that something Korean predates a Chinese or Japanese counterpart, to purge Chinese characters from the language, to see foreign contacts as largely negative, and, as noted above, to glorify Korean "advances" against others. In this campaign, xenophobia, especially anti-Japanese sentiment, has been well utilized by the government through its many agencies to stimulate national sentiment.[14]

Clearly it is unfair to blame only Japanese and Koreans for adopting dubious methods in order to cast a kind light on their past. We all do it in our school texts, concerned as we are in developing the next generation of citizens who will inherit the task of advancing the nation's interests. It is in the nature of

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the nation state system. In such texts, historians may operate under different criteria than when writing for their colleagues; they are more likely to be shaped by an explicit or implicit requirement to generate a good feeling about one's nation and its past.

A quick perusal of several texts used in my school district indicates that we too employ euphemisms like "advance" for which Japanese and Korean Education Ministry officials can be criticized. Although textbook coverage of Native Americans (only rarely now Indians) has clearly improved since my high school days, it is not common to say that the Europeans "stole" the land from them or "invaded" a continent. And when Americans "legally" appropriated Indians lands through treaties and forced them to move, this is referred to as a "removal" policy.

Likewise, Germans rounded up and sent Jews and others to "concentration camps" whereas when the US government similarly incarcerated its west coast Japanese-American populace, it sent them to "relocation camps." The terminology might differ if the texts were written from the point of view of Native Americans or Japanese-Americans. So the Japanese and the Koreans are in good company.

FOOTNOTES

1. See G. Cameron Hurst III, "Weaving the Emperor's New Clothes: The Japanese Textbook 'Revision' Controversy," UFSI Reports, 1982/No. 46.

2. Ibid, p. 2.

3. Ibid, pp. 6-7.

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4. Ibid, p. 4.

5. The most notable case involves Professor Ienaga Saburo, whose lawsuit against the Ministry of education has been dragging on for years. See Ienaga Saburo, "The Historical Significance of the Japanese textbook Lawsuit," in the Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Fall 1970)

6. Thomas P. Rohlen, Japan's High Schools, (Berkeley and Los Angeles : University of California Press, 1983), p. 249. 251.

7. Hurst, "Emperor's New Clothes," p. 6.

8. Ibid, p. 8.

9. Frances Fitzgerald, America Revised, (Boston-Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), p. 16.

10. Hurst, p. 8.

11. Korea Herald, December 31, 1982.

12. Quoted in Aidan Foster-Carter, "Listen class, to the latest version of history," Far Eastern Economic Review, December 24, 1987.

13. G. Cameron Hurst II, "'Uri Nara-ism': Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Korea," UFSI Reports, 1985/No. 33 Asia.

14. Thus, for example, the new Independence Hall of Korea collects artifacts and materials devoted to "Korean national resistance to aggression, the fight for independence, the search for a national identity and the record of development and progress. It is intended to awaken the Korean national consciousness and promote patriotism." But the exhibit is overwhelmingly xenophobic in tone, and imagines a mythic "Korean people" in the dawn of antiquity, 5,000 years ago already struggling against "foreigners." Needless to say, Japan is the primary focus of most of the exhibition halls. See Independence Hall of Korea, pamphlet, August 1987, p. 8.

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